

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 TEL AV 09932 01 OF 04 031914Z
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AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY
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AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE
USMISSION USUN NY PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 4 TEL AVIV 9932

EXDIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM THE AMBASSADOR

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR PINT IS
SUBJ: ISRAEL ON THE EVE OF YOUR VISIT

SUMMARY: YOU WILL FIND A PARADOXICAL FEELING OF RELIEF
THAT SADAT HAS SUDDENLY SHOWN HIS TRUE "HARD-LINE"
COLORS, COMBINED WITH WORRY ABOUT IMPENDING STALEMATE
AND THE APPROACH OF OCTOBER. BEGIN,
HOWEVER, REMAINS CONFIDENT THAT HIS NEGOTIATING TACTICS
WILL EVENTUALLY PAY OFF. HIS HEALTH HAS
REBOUNDED EXTRAORDINARILY IN RECENT DAYS; HIS POLITICAL
STOCK IS AGAIN ON THE RISE; AND HIS CABINET IS MORE
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PAGE 02 TEL AV 09932 01 OF 04 031914Z

UNIFIED THAN IT HAS BEEN IN SOME WEEKS BEHIND HIS MOST
RECENT STATEMENTS OF READINESS TO DISCUSS THE ISSUE OF
SOVEREIGNTY AFTER FIVE YEARS. WEIZMAN IS VERY CONCERNED
ABOUT THE LEBANESE SITUATION, AS IS BEGIN, WHILE TO MOST
OF THE COUNTRY IT REMAINS A SIDESHOW. PERES AND THE
LABOR PARTY MADE QUITE A BIT OF HAY OUT OF THE VIENNA
DECLARATION AND PERES' MEETING WITH SADAT; UNFORTUNATELY

FOR LABOR, THAT EPISODE IS ALREADY YESTERDAY'S NEWS.
BEGIN AND MOST OTHER ISRAELIS THINK THAT ONE WAY OR
ANOTHER NEGOTIATIONS WILL BE RESUMED IF THE US WORKS
HARD ENOUGH TO ACHIEVE IT. BUT EXACTLY HOW IT WILL
HAPPEN, THEY DONT HAVE THE FOGGIEST IDEA AT THIS POINT.
END SUMMARY

1. THE SIGHS OF RELIEF AT EGYPTIAN RESPONSIBILITY FOR
THE CANCELLATION OF THE TRILATERAL CONFERENCE AT THE SINAI
FIELD MISSION WERE CLEARLY AUDIBLE FROM WIDELY DISPERSED
LOCATIONS IN THIS COUNTRY, WITH MANY ISRAELIS FEELING
THAT SADAT HAS COMMITTED A MAJOR BLUNDER IN THE "WHO
WANTS PEACE MORE?" COMPETITION. THIS FEELING OF RELIEF
OVER THE AVERSION OF AN ANTICIPATED CONFRONTATION WITH
THE UNITED STATES AND ELATION AT A TACTICAL COUP IN THE PR SWEEP-
STAKES OUTWEIGHS IN MANY ISRAELI MINDS -- TO A GREATER
EXTENT THAN IS HEALTHY -- THE CONCOMITANT ANXIETY
OVER THE SETBACK TO THE PEACE PROCESS THAT IT REPRESENTS.
ISRAELIS HAD BEEN APPROACHING THE SINAI MEETING WITH
THE EXPECTATION THAT, FACED WITH WHAT ISRAEL PERCEIVED AS
COMBINED EGYPTIAN/SAUDI PRESSURE, THE US WOULD PUT FOR-
WARD A PLAN, OR AT LEAST "IDEAS," OF ITS OWN THAT WOULD
INEVITABLY BE CLOSER TO EGYPT'S POSITION THAN THAT OF IS-
RAEL. WITH SADAT'S REJECTION OF THE SFM MEETING, THE IS-
RAELIS HOPE THE HEAT WILL BE OFF THEM, AT LEAST FOR THE
TIME BEING.
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PAGE 03 TEL AV 09932 01 OF 04 031914Z

2. THIS HOPE WAS NO DOUBT NOURISHED BY THE US EXPRESSION
OF DISAPPOINTMENT OVER SADAT'S MOVE -- WHICH, THE ISRAELI
PRESS HAS OBSERVED WITH OBVIOUS SATISFACTION, IS THE FIRST
OVERT MANIFESTATION OF US DISAPPROVAL OF SADAT SINCE HIS
VISIT TO JERUSALEM AND BY YOUR PUBLIC STATEMENT THAT YOU WILL
NOT BE CARRYING A US PEACE PLAN IN YOUR BAGGAGE. THE
UNACCUSTOMED PLEASURE OF SEEING THE MONKEY ON EGYPT'S BACK,
AT LEAST UNTIL THE CONSEQUENCES OF THIS LATEST SETBACK
BECOME CLEARER, SHOULD PRODUCE A SHORT-TERM BOOST IN BEGIN'S
POPULARITY AT HOME. FOR THE PRESENT, MOST ISRAELIS DO NOT
SEEM TO BELIEVE THAT THE END OF THE LINE HAS BEEN REACHED WITH
SADAT. SHOULD THIS OPTIMISM PROVE TO BE MISPLACED, IT IS
DIFFICULT TO PREDICT WITH CERTAINTY THAT BEGIN WILL SUCCEED
IN CASTING MOST OF THE BLAME ON SADAT. FOR NOW, HOW-
EVER, HE IS ENJOYING HIS "MODERATE" ROLE.

3. WHERE DO THE ISRAELIS SEE THE PROCESS GOING FROM HERE?
THE EUPHORIA OF THE SADAT VISIT HAS LONG SINCE VANISHED
AND WITH IT THE BELIEF THAT MAJOR BREAKTHROUGHS ARE POSSIBLE
IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. WE ARE BEGINNING TO HEAR ONCE
AGAIN -- IF NOT A REFERENCE TO THE "STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS"

-- TALK OF A FURTHER PARTIAL SETTLEMENT WITH EGYPT IN THE SINAI INVOLVING THE RETURN OF A MAJOR STRETCH OF TERRITORY IN EXCHANGE FOR SOMETHING LIKE NORMAL RELATIONS, BUT WITHOUT A PEACE TREATY. THIS, PERHAPS COMBINED WITH UNILATERAL ISRAELI IMPLEMENTATION OF PARTS OF THE WEST BANK-GAZA AUTONOMY PLAN, SOME ISRAELIS HOPE, MIGHT KEEP ISRAEL -EGYPTIAN RAPPROACHMENT ALIVE WHILE ENABLING ISRAEL TO DEMONSTRATE THE GOOD FAITH OF ITS STATED INTENTION TO REDUCE ITS INVOLVEMENT IN THE DAILY LIVES OF THE PALESTINIANS.

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 09932 02 OF 04 031959Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 4 TEL AVIV 9932

EXDIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM THE AMBASSADOR

4. THE TRUTH IS, HOWEVER, THAT MOST ISRAELIS HAVE LITTLE IDEA OF WHERE THE PEACE PROCESS IS GOING OR HOW ISRAEL SHOULD PROCEED. THE AVERAGE ISRAELI DOES NOT FOLLOW THE DAILY UPS AND DOWNS OF THE EGYPT-ISRAEL ROLLER COASTER, BUT HAS A GOOD DEAL OF FAITH THAT HIS ELECTED LEADERS KNOW WHAT THEY ARE DOING. ISRAELIS HOPE THE SADAT INITIATIVE IS NOT MORIBUND, BUT IF IT TURNS OUT TO BE SO, FEWER AND FEWER ISRAELIS SEEM PREPARED AT THIS POINT TO BELIEVE THAT THEY HAD MUCH TO DO WITH ITS DEMISE. THIS IS NOT TO SUGGEST THAT THOUGHTFUL

ISRAELIS ARE NOT PERTURBED ABOUT THE RUPTURE OF DIRECT
CONTACTS WITH EGYPT AND THE APPARENT REVERSAL OF ALL THAT HAD
BEEN GAINED SINCE THE SADAT VISIT. THE POSSIBILITY OF ANOTHER
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PAGE 02 TEL AV 09932 02 OF 04 031959Z

WAR WITH EGYPT, EVEN SEVERAL YEARS OFF, IS DEEPLY DISTURBING,
BUT THIS SIMPLY DOES NOT TRANSLATE INTO GREATER WILLINGNESS
TO THINK ABOUT THE UNTHINKABLE -- GIVING NEARLY ALL OF THE
WEST BANK BACK TO THE ARABS. IN SHORT, BEGIN IS FEELING
VERY LITTLE DOMESTIC PRESSURE FOR FURTHER CONCESSIONS, AND THIS
IS ESPECIALLY TRUE AFTER SADAT'S HARDLINE PRESS CONFERENCE
AFTER HIS MEETING WITH ROY ATHERTON.

5. MOREOVER, AS YOU KNOW, THERE HAS BEEN FOR YEARS AN IM-
PLICIT CONFIDENCE HERE THAT, IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, THE
U.S. WILL, AS IT HAS IN THE PAST, SEE IT ISRAEL'S WAY. THAT
CONFIDENCE HAS BEEN BADLY SHAKEN DURING THE CARTER ADMINIS-
TRATION, BUT WILL PARTIALLY REVIVE IF SADAT CONTINUES TO MAKE
"UNREALISTIC" DEMANDS AS THE PRICE OF PEACE. IN THAT SITUATION,
ISRAELIS WILL EXPECT AMERICAN SUPPORT, HOPEFULLY FROM THE
ADMINISTRATION, BUT IF NOT FROM THERE, THEN CERTAINLY FROM
THE CONGRESS.

6. THE SOUTHERN LEBANON CRISIS, IN WHICH WE ARE SO ENGROSSED
AT THE MOMENT, IS FOR MOST ISRAELIS SIMPLY NOT MUCH OF AN
ISSUE. THEY SEEM TO TAKE AT FACE VALUE THE STANDARD SLOGANS
ABOUT INNOCENT BESIEGED CHRISTIANS, MARAUDING PALESTINIANS
AND TREACHEROUS SYRIANS AND ASSUME THAT ISRAEL SIMPLY
DOING IN LEBANON WHAT IT HAS TO DO TO DEFEND ITS INTERESTS.
VOICES OF DISSENT FROM THE GOI'S HARDLINE ON S. LEBANON ARE
ALL BUT NON-EXISTENT.

7. THE ABORTION OF THE SFM MEETING IS THE LATEST OF
A SERIES OF EVENTS SINCE THE LEEDS CONFERENCE THAT HAVE
BROUGHT THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT TO ITS MOST SELF-CONFIDENT AND
UNIFIED STATE IN MONTHS. THE MEETINGS OF BOTH OPPOSITION
LEADER PERES AND DEFENSE MINISTER WEIZMAN WITH SADAT ON THE
EVE OF THE LEEDS CONFERENCE HAD LEFT BEGIN IN AN EXPOSED
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PAGE 03 TEL AV 09932 02 OF 04 031959Z

POSITION DOMESTICALLY. PERES AND WEIZMAN REPORTED THAT THEY
HAD FOUND SADAT EAGER FOR PEACE AND AMENABLE TO BOTH MINOR
BORDER MODIFICATIONS (ABBA EBAN LATER SAID THIS MEANT SADAT
HAD ACCEPTED TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE IN PRINCIPLE) AND A
PROLONGED ISRAELI SECURITY PRESENCE ON THE WEST BANK. IN ADDI-
TION, PERES COULD CLAIM CREDIT FOR THE STATEMENT ISSUED BY

KREISKY AND BRANDT IN THE NAME OF THE SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL,
WHICH WAS A MAJOR IMPROVEMENT, FROM ISRAEL'S POINT
OF VIEW, IN THE WESTERN EUROPEAN POSITION ON THE M-E.

8. UPON DAYAN'S RETURN FROM LEEDS, BEGIN AND COMPANY
MOUNTED A COUNTER-ATTACK. AS WE EXPECTED, DAYAN WASTED NO
TIME PUBLICIZING KAMEL'S NEGATIVE ANSWER TO HIS QUESTION ON
EGYPTIAN WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT A TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE AND
USED THIS TO BELITTLE THE ALIGNMENT'S PROGRAM AS BASED ON A
CONCEPT THAT EGYPT HAD ALREADY REJECTED OUTRIGHT. HEAVY-
HANDED LEAKAGE OF PERES' REPORT TO BEGIN FORCED SADAT TO
ISSUE DENIALS, WHICH BEGIN THEN USED TO FURTHER DISCREDIT
PERES' OPTIMISTIC PICTURE OF LABOR'S PEACE-MAKING POTENTIAL.

9. THE PIECE DE RESISTANCE OF BEGIN'S COUNTER-OFFENSIVE
WAS DAYAN'S REVELATION ON JULY 25 OF THE GOVERNMENT'S NEW
THREE-POINT POLICY STATEMENT. IN ADDITION TO DECLARING
FORMALLY THAT THE LIKUD GOVERNMENT WOULD CONSIDER A TERRI-
TORIAL COMPROMISE SHOULD THE OTHER SIDE PROPOSE ONE, THE
GOVERNMENT NOW CLAIMED, IN EFFECT, TO HAVE MET US EXPECTA-
TIONS BY DECLARING A WILLINGNESS TO "DISCUSS" THE ISSUE OF
SOVEREIGNTY OF THE WEST BANK AND GAZA AT THE END OF A FIVE-
YEAR TRANSITION PERIOD, ADDING THAT "IT WILL BE POSSIBLE TO
FIND A SOLUTION TO THIS ISSUE." HA'ARETZ EXPRESSED THE VIEW
OF MANY THOUGHTFUL ISRAELIS IN DESCRIBING THE DAYAN STATE-
MENT AS "THE MOST FORTHCOMING OPENING POSITION ANY ISRAELI
GOVERNMENT IS LIKELY TO OFFER" AND ADVISING EGYPT TO GRAB IT.

10. BEGIN'S CAMPAIGN TO DISCREDIT HIS DOMESTIC ADVERSARIES
HAS BEEN GIVEN A STRONG IF UNWITTING ASSIST BY SADAT'S
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PAGE 04 TEL AV 09932 02 OF 04 031959Z

CONSTANT PRAISE OF WEIZMAN AND PERES, DESPITE THE FORMER'S

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 09932 03 OF 04 032038Z
ACTION SS-25

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 3 OF 4 TEL AVIV 9932

EXDIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM THE AMBASSADOR

REPEATED PLEAS TO DESIST. SADAT'S CLUMSY EFFORTS TO PROMOTE THE FORTUNES OF BEGIN'S RIVALS AND TO DIVIDE THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT FROM WITHIN HAVE HAD PRECISELY THE OPPOSITE EFFECT AND HAVE STRENGTHENED BEGIN'S HAND CONSIDERABLY. THE FERMENT IN THE BODY POLITIC SO EVIDENT UNTIL A FEW WEEKS AGO HAS LOST MOST OF ITS FIZZ. TO QUOTE THE LEADING DMC DOVE, AMNON RUBINSTEIN, "SADAT IS KILLING US," SENTIMENTS THAT HAVE BEEN ECHOED TO US BY YITZHAK RABIN.

11. BEGIN SEEMS ALSO TO HAVE MANAGED TO TURN THE HEALTH ISSUE TO HIS ADVANTAGE. AFTER SEVERAL MONTHS OF GENERAL WEAKNESS AND INTERMITTENT ILLNESS, BEGIN HAS IN THE LAST
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PAGE 02 TEL AV 09932 03 OF 04 032038Z

FEW WEEKS APPEARED TO HAVE RECOVERED WITH A VENGEANCE. HE HAS MADE A POINT IN RECENT KNESSET APPEARANCES OF RIDICULING REPORTS OF HIS INFIRMITY, WHILE CLAIMING SOMEWHAT CONTRA-DICTORILY THAT HIS RECENT TURNABOUT ON THE ANSWERS TO THE AMERICAN QUESTIONS RESULTED IN PART FROM A RECOVERY FROM THE ILL HEALTH HE WAS EXPERIENCING AT THE TIME OF THE ORIGINAL DEBATE. HE HAS IN FACT TRIED WITH SOME SUCCESS TO USE THE HEALTH ISSUE AGAINST HIS OPPONENTS BY CHARGING THEM WITH IMPROPRIETY IN MAKING POLITICAL CAPITAL OUT OF IT.

12. DESPITE THE FOREGOING, BEGIN'S RECENT COMPORTMENT HAS LEFT MANY OBSERVERS PUZZLED. HIS Demeanor BEFORE THE KNESSET AT THE OPENING OF THE FOREIGN POLICY DEBATE WAS DESCRIBED BY SOME AS "MANIC" AND -- CONTRARY TO HIS NORMAL GENTLEMANLY MANNER -- UNCOUTH. HIS CRACK ABOUT "MOROCCO, SHMOROCCO" IS SAID TO HAVE OFFENDED NOT ONLY THE RULER OF THAT REALM,

BUT ALSO MANY ISRAELIS OF NORTH AFRICAN ORIGIN, WHO CONSTITUTE THE CORE OF BEGIN'S CONSTITUENCY. HIS BLUNT PUBLIC REVELATION AND SIMULTANEOUS REJECTION OF SADAT'S EL-ARISH PROPOSAL, BEFORE SADAT HAD EVEN RECEIVED A REPLY PRIVATELY, WAS WIDELY REGARDED AS GRATUITOUSLY INSULTING AND PROVOKING SADAT'S DECISION TO EXPEL THE ISRAELI MILITARY LIAISON TEAM. DOMESTICALLY, THERE IS CONSIDERABLE DISCONTENT WITH THE GOVERNMENT ECONOMIC AND FISCAL POLICY, BUT BEGIN HAS CHOSEN TO IGNORE THIS AND, ALMOST INEXPLICABLY, HE IS ALLOWED TO GET AWAY WITH IT, IN THAT IT SEEMS TO HAVE ALMOST NO IMPACT ON HIS POPULARITY. NEVERTHELESS, THE MOST RECENT HA'ARETZ POLL (JULY 24-26) SHOWS A REDUCTION OF ELEVEN PERCENTAGE POINTS IN THE LEVEL OF PUBLIC APPROVAL OF BEGIN'S CONDUCT OF PEACE NEGOTIATIONS OVER HIS RATING IN MID-MAY (61 PER CENT VS 73 PER CENT).

13. BECAUSE OF THE STRONG RIGHTWARD TENDENCY IN THE ELECTIONS
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PAGE 03 TEL AV 09932 03 OF 04 032038Z

TORATE, THE OPPOSITION HAS SHOWN ITSELF UNABLE TO CAPITALIZE ON THESE LAPSES. PERES' NOT INCONSIDERABLE ACHIEVEMENT, THE KREISKY-BRANDT STATEMENT, WAS QUICKLY ECLIPSED BY WEIZMAN'S MEETING WITH SADAT AND HAS SUBSEQUENTLY SUNK ALMOST WITHOUT A TRACE, A TESTAMENT TO ISRAELI CYNICISM ABOUT THE VALUE OF EUROPEAN OPINION IN GENERAL AND THAT OF BRUNO KREISKY IN PARTICULAR. BEGIN'S ACCUSATIONS OF THE DIVISIVENESS OF THE OPPOSITION'S NEGOTIATING WITH SADAT, FAIR OR NOT, SEEM TO HAVE FOUND THEIR MARK. THOUGH ITS STANDING MAY HAVE RISEN marginally AS A RESULT OF PERES' RECENT INITIATIVES, LABOR SEEMS NO MORE CAPABLE OF BRINGING DOWN THE LIKUD GOVERNMENT TODAY THAN IT DID SIX MONTHS AGO.

14. THE INTERNAL "OPPOSITION" IN THE COALITION IS NOT FARING MUCH BETTER.
THE MORE DOVISH ELEMENTS OF THE DMC CONTINUE TO FLAIL ABOUT IN THEIR EFFORTS TO PULL THE MOVEMENT OUT OF THE GOVERNMENT AND PRECIPITATE A POLITICAL CRISIS. A MONTH AFTER THE DMC INTERNAL ELECTIONS, THE RESULTS OF WHICH HAVE ONLY JUST BEEN CERTIFIED, THE PARTY IS AS FRAGMENTED AS EVER. EVEN IF THE DOVES EVENTUALLY GAIN CONTROL, THE MAJORITY OF ITS FIFTEEN-MEMBER KNESSET DELEGATION WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY STICK WITH THE COALITION, EVEN AT THE COST OF SPLITTING THE PARTY.

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 09932 04 OF 04 032042Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 4 OF 4 TEL AVIV 9932

EXDIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM THE AMBASSADOR

15. SIMILARLY, THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT SEEMS TO BE ENJOYING MORE COHESION AT THE TOP THAN AT ANY TIME IN RECENT MEMORY. BEGIN'S ACCEPTANCE OF DAYAN'S LANGUAGE ON THE WEST BANK SOVEREIGNTY QUESTION REDUCED THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THEM TO A SIGNIFICANT EXTENT AND HAS, AT THE SAME TIME, CONTRIBUTED TO RAPPROACHMENT (PROBABLY TEMPORARY) BETWEEN DAYAN AND WEIZMAN, WHO HAVE BEEN SEEN CONSPICUOUSLY LUNCHING TOGETHER IN THE KNESSET FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MANY WEEKS. WEIZMAN NOW APPRECIATES MORE CLEARLY HIS NEED TO JOIN FORCES WITH DAYAN. ON THE ONE HAND, WEIZMAN REALIZES THAT BEGIN WILL NO LONGER PERMIT HIM THE FREEDOM TO DASH OFF TO MEETINGS WITH SADAT AND TO PURSUE PERSONAL DIPLOMACY. ON
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PAGE 02 TEL AV 09932 04 OF 04 032042Z

THE OTHER HAND, THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT POSTURE IS ONE WITH WHICH HE IS CONSIDERABLY MORE COMFORTABLE. BEGIN CAN CONGRATULATE HIMSELF ON THE DEGREE OF UNITY -- EVEN IF TEMPORARY -- HE HAS SUCCEEDED IN FORGING WITHIN HIS GOVERNMENT. IN SUM, THE BEGIN YOU WILL BE MEETING WITH IS A SELF-CONFIDENT LEADER, FULLY IN CONTROL OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF HIS GOVERNMENT AND

ON THE OFFENSIVE AFTER SADAT'S LATEST POSITION. AND HE WILL
BE ESPECIALLY LOOKING FOR ANY SIGN FROM YOU THAT THE ADMIN-
ISTRATION IS ABOUT TO PUT FORWARD A US PEACE PROPOSAL, A
PROPOSAL THAT ISRAELIS BELIEVE WILL INEVITABLY BE INFLUENCED
BY THE LATEST PRESSURE FROM CAIRO. LEWIS

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